

Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, February 18, 1808, from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO JAMES MONROE J. MSS.

Washington, Feb. 18, '08.

My dear Sir, —You informed me that the instruments you had been so kind as to bring for me from England, would arrive at Richmond with your baggage, and you wished to know what was to be done with them there. I will ask the favor of you to deliver them to Mr. Jefferson, who will forward them to Monticello in the way I shall advise him. And I must entreat you to send me either a note of their amount, or the bills, that I may be enabled to reimburse you. There can be no pecuniary matter between us, against which this can be any set-off. But if, contrary to my recollection or knowledge, there were anything, I pray that that may be left to be settled by itself. If I could have known the amount beforehand, I should have remitted it, and asked the advance only under the idea that it should be the same as ready money to you on your arrival. I must again, therefore, beseech you to let me know its amount.

I see with infinite grief a contest arising between yourself and another, who have been very dear to each other, and equally so to me. I sincerely pray that these dispositions may not be affected between you; with me I confidently trust they will not. For independently of the dictates of public duty, which prescribe neutrality to me, my sincere friendship for you both will ensure it's sacred observance. I suffer no one to converse with me on the subject. I already perceive my old friend Clinton, estranging himself from me. No doubt lies are carried to him, as they will be to the other two candidates, under forms which however

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false, he can scarcely question. Yet I have been equally careful as to him also, never to say a word on this subject. The object of the contest is a fair & honorable one, equally open to you all; and I have no doubt the personal conduct of all will be so chaste, as to

offer no ground of dissatisfaction with each other. But your friends will not be as delicate. I know too well from experience the progress of political controversy, and the exacerbation of spirit into which it degenerates, not to fear for the continuance of your mutual esteem. One piquing thing said draws on another, that a third, and always with increasing acrimony, until all restraint is thrown off, and it becomes difficult for yourselves to keep clear of the toils in which your friends will endeavor to interlace you, and to avoid the participation in their passions which they will endeavor to produce. A candid recollection of what you know of each other will be the true corrective. With respect to myself, I hope they will spare me. My longings for retirement are so strong, that I with difficulty encounter the daily drudgeries of my duty. But my wish for retirement itself is not stronger than that of carrying into it the affections of all my friends. I have ever viewed Mr. Madison and yourself as two principal pillars of my happiness. Were either to be withdrawn, I should consider it as among the greatest calamities which could assail my future peace of mind. I have great confidence that the candor & high understanding of both will guard me against this misfortune, the bare possibility of which has so far weighed on my mind, that I could not be easy without unburthening it.

Accept my respectful salutations for yourself and Mrs. Monroe, & be assured of my constant & sincere friendship.¹

¹ The following letters from Jefferson to Monroe, relate to this “sore headedness” of the latter:

“ Washington, Mar. 10, '08.

“ Dear Sir,— * * * From your letter of the 27th ultimo, I perceive that painful impressions have been made on your mind during your late mission, of which I had never entertained

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a suspicion. I must, therefore, examine the grounds, because explanations between reasonable men can never but do good. 1. You consider the mission of Mr. Pinckney as an associate, to have been in some way injurious to you. Were I to take that measure on myself, I might say in its justification, that it has been the regular & habitual practice of the U S to do this, under every form in which their government has existed. I need not recapitulate the multiplied instances, because you will readily recollect them. I went as an adjunct to Dr. Franklin & Mr. Adams, yourself as an adjunct first to Mr. Livingston, and then to Mr. Pinckney, & I really believe there has scarcely been a great occasion which has not produced an extraordinary mission. Still, however, it is well known that I was strongly opposed to it in the case of which you complain. A committee of the Senate called on me with two resolutions of that body on the subject of impressment & spoliations by G Britain, & requesting that I would demand satisfaction. After delivering the resolutions, the committee entered into free conversation, and observed, that although the Senate could not, in form, recommend any extraordinary mission, yet that as individuals, there was but one sentiment among them on the measure, and they pressed it. I was so much averse to it, & gave them so hard an answer, that they felt it, and spoke of it. But it did not end here. The members of the other House took up the subject, and set upon me individually, and these the best friends to you, as well as myself, and represented the responsibility which a failure to obtain redress would throw on us both, pursuing a conduct in opposition to the opinion of nearly every member of the Legislature. I found it necessary, at length, to yield my own opinion to the general sense of the national council, and it really seemed to produce a jubilee among them; not from any want of confidence in you, but from a belief in the effect which an extraordinary mission would have on the British mind, by demonstrating the degree of importance which this country attached to the rights which we considered as infringed.

“2. You complain of the manner in which the treaty was received. But what was that manner? I cannot suppose you to have given a moment's credit to the stuff which was crowded in all sorts of forms into the public papers, or to the thousand speeches they

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put into my mouth, not a word of which I had ever uttered. I was not insensible at the time of the views to mischief, with which these lies were fabricated. But my confidence was firm, that neither yourself nor the British government, equally outraged by them, would believe me capable of making the editors of newspapers the confidants of my speeches or opinions. The fact was this. The treaty was communicated to us by Mr. Erskine on the day Congress was to rise. Two of the Senators inquired of me in the evening, whether it was my purpose to detain them on account of the treaty. My answer was, 'that it was not: that the treaty containing no provision against the impressment of our seamen, and being accompanied by a kind of protestation of the British ministers, which would leave that government free to consider it as a treaty or no treaty, according to their own convenience, I should not give them the trouble of deliberating on it.' This was substantially, & almost verbally, what I said whenever spoken to about it, and I never failed when the occasion would admit of it, to justify yourself and Mr. Pinckney, by expressing my conviction, that it was all that could be obtained from the British government; that you had told their commissioners that your government could not be pledged to ratify, because it was contrary to their instructions; of course, that it should be considered but as a project; and in this light I stated it publicly in my message to Congress on the opening of the session. Not a single article of the treaty was ever made known beyond the members of the administration, nor would an article of it be known at this day, but for its publication in the newspapers, as communicated by somebody from beyond the water, as we have always understood. But as to myself, I can solemnly protest, as the most sacred of truths, that I never, one instant, lost sight of your reputation and favorable standing with your country, & never omitted to justify your failure to attain our wish, as one which was probably unattainable. Reviewing therefore, this whole subject, I cannot doubt you will become sensible, that your impressions have been without just ground. I cannot, indeed, judge what falsehoods may have been written or told you; and that, under such forms as to command belief. But you will soon find, my dear Sir, that so inveterate is the rancor of party spirit among us, that nothing ought to be credited but what we hear with our own ears. If you are less on your guard than we are here, at this moment, the

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designs of the mischief-makers will not fail to be accomplished, and brethren & friends will be made strangers & enemies to each other, without ever having said or thought a thing amiss of each other. I presume that the most insidious falsehoods are daily carried to you, as they are brought to me, to engage us in the passions of our informers, and stated so positively & plausibly as to make even *doubt* a rudeness to the narrator; who, imposed on himself, has no other than the friendly view of putting us on our guard. My answer is, invariably, that my knowledge of your character is better testimony to me of a negative, than any affirmative which my informant did not hear *from yourself* with his own ears. In fact, when you shall have been a little longer among us you will find that little is to be believed which interests the prevailing passions, and happens beyond the limits of our own senses. Let us not then, my dear friend, embark our happiness and our affections on the ocean of slander, of falsehood & of malice, on which our credulous friends are floating. If you have been made to believe that I ever did, said, or thought a thing unfriendly to your fame & feelings, you do me injury as causeless as it is afflicting to me. In the present contest in which you are concerned, I feel no passion, I take no part, I express no sentiment. Whichever of my friends is called to the supreme cares of the nation, I know that they will be wisely & faithfully administered, and as far as my individual conduct can influence, they shall be cordially supported. For myself I have nothing further to ask of the world, than to preserve in retirement so much of their esteem as I may have fairly earned, and to be permitted to pass in tranquillity, in the bosom of my family & friends, the days which yet remain for me. Having reached the harbor myself, I shall view with anxiety (but certainly not with a wish to be in their place) those who are still buffeting the storm, uncertain of their fate. Your voyage has so far been favorable, & that it may continue with entire prosperity, is the sincere prayer of that friendship which I have ever borne you, and of which I now assure you, with the tender of my high respect & affectionate salutations.”

“ Washington, Apr. 11, 08.

“ Dear Sir,—An indisposition of periodical headache has for some time disabled me from business, and prevented my sooner acknowledging your letter of Mar. 22 and

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returning that of Feb. 2 06 which it inclosed. The receipt of that of Mar. 22 has given me sincere pleasure. Conscious that I never felt a sentiment towards you that was not affectionate it is a great relief to find that the doubts you have entertained on that subject are removed by an explanation of the circumstances which produced them. Some matters however, appearing from your letter, not yet sufficiently understood, I have conceived that a more minute detail of the facts bearing on them would compleatly disarm them of all misconstruction. I will state them in their exact chronological order, because that alone will resolve all doubts to which they may have given rise:

"1805 While at Madrid, you signified your anxious wish & determination to return home, on considerations respecting your private interests.

"1806, Feb. 21. The Senate passed their resolutions to demand satisfaction of England for spoliations & impressments. These were accompanied by a pressure from that body (informally) to add to both the commissions at London and Paris; and were backed by such earnest solicitations from the individual members of the other house as showed the opinion to be general that such an enlargement manifesting our sense of the importance of the missions, would make the greater impression.

"28. Having at length yielded (with a reluctance, well remembered by all) I nominated Armstrong & Bowdoin to treat with Spain at Paris, and

"March (about the beginning of the month) Mr. Pinckney was applied to accept the appointment as joint commissioner with you, with a commission to succeed you when you should leave London.

"March 11. Mr. Madison's letter was written giving you notice of it.

"13. Mr. Pinckney accepted.

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"16. My first letter to you was written, mentioning Mr. Pinckney would be associated with you.

"18. My 2d letter, mentioning the possibility of adding a 3d commissioner for having proposed to a particular individual to be added to Armstrong & Bowdoin at Paris it was thought necessary, if that should take place, to make an equal addition for London. But the refusal of that person prevented further addition at either place.

"31. Apr. 1, 2. Your letter of Feb. 2 is believed to have been received on one of these days. Being a private one, the date of its receipt was not noted in the office, but I presume it was received Apr. 2, because I find I received on that day letters from Europe, which probably came by the same conveyance.

"Apr. 19. The nomination of Pinckney & yourself was not made *in form* till this day, because he was not ready to go, and the answer of the 3d commissioner proposed for Paris was received but a few days before this.

"I had as you conjectured, really forgotten your letter of Feb. 2 by which the joining of an associate with you appeared to be unacceptable: but you will perceive that before its receipt, the measure was too far engaged to be undone, even if I could have ventured to have undone it against the general wish of the legislature and consequently that it had not been adopted in opposition to your advice, as that came too late to influence the decision.

"Another circumstance, to wit, why you did not receive the first information of this association from either Mr. Madison or myself, is explained by this statement of dates. Mr. Madison's letter of Mar. 11 gave the intimation with less positiveness perhaps because written before Mr. Pinckney's acceptance was known: and an unfortunate disappointment prevented the success of my attempt, by the two original letters now inclosed to you. The purpose of appointing Mr. Pinckney was known about the beginning of March. On the 5th of that month Mr. John Randolph came out with his first philippic against the administration

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on the subject of the resolutions respecting Great Britain, which he followed up closely with others in close succession. Believing that an use was made of your name which was unjustifiable, I felt great anxiety to put you on your guard. A Mr. Prentis was going to England, and promised he would call at Norfolk and take any letters I should lodge there for you. I accordingly wrote that of Mar. 16 and another two days after showing you how little the H. of R. had been influenced by the desertion of their leader, mentioning that Mr. Pinckney would be associated with you, and perhaps even a third, and promising more detailed explanations by a confidential person (Mr. Beckley) who meant to sail for London on the rising of Congress. Unfortunately Prentis never called on Colo. Newton with whom my letters were deposited, which therefore were returned to me, but not till June (the originals returned, which I happened to preserve are now returned to you) and Beckley declined his voyage, so that my effort to give you information was frustrated.

“A third circumstance is to be noticed, and will close these supplementary explanations; to wit, that the letters from hence containing no expression of a desire that you should come home or remain there, & the facility afforded to your departure by the commissions to Mr. Pinckney seemed to authorize an inference that you were considered as in the way of the administration. The truth however was thus. Your letters from Madrid in 1804.⁵ expressed your anxious wish & intention to come home on your return to London. My extreme wish was that you should remain there, and I hoped by not being in a hurry to answer that manifestation of your desire, time might produce a change in your mind. But as soon as it was known (during the session of 1805.⁶) that yourself and Mr. Madison were both contemplated as candidates for the succession to the presidency, I became apprehensive that by declining longer to assent to your return, I might be suspected of a partial design to keep you out of the way. In fact it was openly said by some of those who were pressing your name and popularity into the service of their vindictive fashions. This produced the acquiescence in your desire to come home which then took place, and the commission to Mr. Pinckney to succeed you whenever you should determine to come. And these motives clearly show themselves in my letter of Mar. 16 which says ‘I

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shall join Mr. Pinckney of Maryland as your associate for settling our differences with G. Britain. He will be authorized to take your place *whenever* you think yourself obliged to return. It is desirable for *your own*, as well as the *public* interest that you should join in the settlement of this business, and I am perfectly satisfied that if this can be done so as to be here *before the next meeting of Congress*, it will be greatly for your benefit. But I do not mean by this *to overrule your own determination* (*i.e.* either to stay or come home) which measures to be taken here will place in perfect freedom.' Here you will perceive how much I wished your aid in the joint commission, and that your longer continuance there could not but, in itself, be desirable, but that I did not ask it from an apprehension that your return before the next Congress might be important to your higher interests.

"I consider it now as a great misfortune that my letter of Mar. 16 did not go on to you. It would, I trust, have corrected the inferences of a change in my affections towards you drawn from a combination of circumstances, which circumstances were produced from very different causes, and some of them from the strength of those very affections of which you thought that they noted a diminution, a desire to conform your movements, in point of time, to what I deemed your best interests. I have gone thus minutely into these details from a desire to eradicate from your mind every fiber of doubt as to my sentiments towards you; and I am persuaded they will satisfactorily solve every circumstance which might at any time have occasioned doubt. I have done it too the more cordially because I perceive from your letter that disposition to a correct view of the subject which I knew to be inherent in your mind. What I have hitherto said has been confined to my own part only of these transactions. Yet it would be a criminal suppression of truth were I not to add that in the whole course of them Mr. Madison has appeared to be governed by the most cordial friendship for you, has manifested on every occasion the most attentive concern for whatever might befriend your fame or fortune, and been as much alive to whatever regarded you, as a brother could have been.

"I must now introduce a different concern. Lafayette's difficulties are pressing. You told us you thought Barrington would readily give him a delay of 10 years. That term would so

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advance the value of his N. Orleans location that it would pay his debts without touching the mass of his grant. Barring is said to be arrived in this country. You said you would write to him on the subject. If you will send me such a letter it will give an opening for a negociation with him. We are giving orders for the immediate location of his lands, so as to make them a safe pledge. I salute you with great & unchanged affections.”

“ Washington, Oct. 12, 08.

“ Dear Sir,—Such was the accumulation of business awaiting me here, that it was not till this day that I could take time to look into my letters to you. As my copies are with the Polygraph I can refer to the originals in your hands by the page and line.

“Letter of Feb. 18. 1st paragraph to be omitted, being merely of private business.

“Pa. 1. l. 22. Perhaps the word ‘old’ may be misunderstood, & therefore better omitted.

“Mar. 10. Omit the 1st paragraph, as merely of private business.

“Pa. 1. l. 13. Strike out ‘were I to take &c.’ to ‘in its justification that’ and insert ‘but.’ You will be readily sensible that this whole passage would have an unpleasant effect both to myself & others if published.

“L. 21. Strike out ‘still however &c.’ to the end of the paragraph in p. 2. l. 14. for the reason preceding.

“Apr. 11. pa. 1. l. 12. Strike out ‘I will state &c.’ to page 3 l. 22. ‘to wit’ inclusive, and insert ‘you observe.’

“These details would be perverted & malignantly commented by our common enemies, and have bearings which render them improper for publication.

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“Pa.5. Strike out the last paragraph respecting Lafayette's affairs. Indeed the whole of these letters were written without the least idea that they would ever be before the public and therefore, after stating the preceding omissions, I would rather trust your judgment than my own in deciding whether there be anything more which had better be omitted whether as respects myself or others. To me it is desirable that the public should know the high estimation in which I hold both you and Mr. Madison, & that no circumstance has abated my affection for either. I salute you with sincere friendship & respect.”